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SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DS/IP/NEA
STATE ALSO PLEASE PASS USAID/DCHA/OFDA
USAID FOR ANE/AA GORDON WEST AND JIM BEVER
MANILA FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA
LONDON FOR POL/REIDEL
TREASURY FOR GENERAL COUNSEL/DAUFHAUSER AND DAS JZARATE
TREASURY ALSO FOR OFAC/RNEWCOMB AND TASK FORCE ON TERRORIST
FINANCING
JUSTICE FOR OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL/DLAUFMAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: UPDATE ON MAOIST ACTIVITIES, DEC 21-DEC 27

SUMMARY

1. The Centre For Economic and Social Development released a study on December 24 that showed an overwhelming majority of Nepalis, particularly those in Maoist infested areas, support a multi-party democracy. The local press reported that India has tightened security along its northern borders following reports of Maoists entering the area, while the Indian Ambassador claimed to the press that two Indian terrorist groups have been crossing the border to train in camps located in Nepal. Amnesty International has accused the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) of intimidating two victims into recanting their allegations of rape by top army officials. The RNA is facing increasing pressure from the media and human rights organizations for alleged human rights abuses. Skepticism surrounds the proposed peace talks between the government and Maoists as both sides demand formal peace proposals. Maoist violence continued, with the killings of three policemen, a soldier, and a schoolteacher, and a December 26 bomb blast in downtown Kathmandu. The insurgents also abducted, but later released, unharmed, 45 schoolchildren; kidnapped a local development officer; destroyed a police post; and increased extortion demands. Besides a one-day general strike in the western region that disrupted business, education and transportation, the Maoists have also called a strike December 29-30 in the Narayani and Bagmati zones, which includes the Kathmandu Valley. Another bandh has been declared for January 3 in the southeastern city of Biratnagar to disrupt a visit to that area by the King.

NEPALIS FAVOR MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY

2. A survey conducted by the Centre For Economic and Social Development (CESOD), a Kathmandu based non-governmental organization, released December 24, shows that over 73 percent of Nepalis support a multi-party democracy. CESOD conducted its research over a six-month period, in the districts of Surkhet, Bardia, Sindhuli, Rautahat, Morang, and Dhankuta, all of which are infested with Maoists. The report also stated that villagers favor a democracy that is free from corruption and want the current political crisis to be solved through dialogue.

INDIA PUTS PARAMILITARY FORCES ALONG BORDER

3. According to the local press, India has placed paramilitary forces along its borders, following reports that Maoist rebels were crossing into Northern India. Shyam Saran, India's Ambassador to Nepal, publicly denied that India harbors Nepali Maoists, instead blaming the open border. Saran also said that members of two Indian terrorist groups, the Maoist Coordination Committee (MCC) and the Peoples War Group (PWG) cross the border into Nepal to enter training camps. Saran asserted that India will not take part in any joint military action with Nepal against the Maoists, nor play any role in mediating talks between the Government of Nepal (GON) and the Maoists.

RNA UNDER FIRE, HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE

4. Following publication of its December 19 report on Nepal, Amnesty International (AI) accused the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) of pressuring two victims highlighted in the report to recant their allegations of rape against army officials. The AI statement called upon the GON to ensure the protection and safety of all victims of human rights abuses. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a statement castigating the GON for failing to acknowledge the AI report and demanding that the GON investigate human rights abuses and punish violators accordingly. NHRC announced that it will send teams of

observers to the western districts of Banke and Baridya to monitor the situations there. Meanwhile, the Non Government Federation and the Association of International NGOs have joined in expressing their "grave concern" over human rights abuses by both the Maoists and the government, citing the escalation of rape, torture, kidnappings and disappearances of civilians. The Human Rights and Peace Society denounced the November 27 killings by the RNA of five young men and boys in Nuwakot as a human rights violation.

15. Under increasing pressure from the media and human rights organizations, the RNA held a press conference December 26 to defend its human rights record and give its version of two well publicized cases, the killing of five youths in the Nuwakot district as well as the allegations of rape by top Army officials.

16. The Royal Nepal Army (RNA) issued a statement denying the accusations of rape. Gurung said the reports of rape were baseless and denied that the victims were forced to recant their stories. He showed video footage of the two women involved and claimed that they appeared relaxed and not under any pressure to recant their stories. Preliminary results of the RNA investigation into the Nuwakot killings indicate that the five youths may have been innocent, Gurung acknowledged. Should the final investigation support those initial findings, appropriate action against the soldiers involved will be taken, he pledged.

MAOISTS DECLARE BANDHS

17. Maoists have declared a two-day general strike (bandh) for December 29 and 30 in the Bagmati and Narayani zones, to include the Kathmandu Valley. Taxi and bus services will be shut down, and businesses and schools closed. In the past, vehicles that break the strike have been attacked. The Maoists have also declared a bandh in southeastern Nepal, to include the Biratnagar area, on January 3, which coincides with a visit by the King to that region.

18. Maoists called a one-day bandh on December 25 in the western region that affected businesses, schools and transportation. Districts affected by the bandh included Baglung, Rupandehi, and Nawalparasi. Major businesses, schools and industries closed, and highways were empty.

PM CHAND WANTS FORMAL PROPOSAL FROM MAOISTS

19. Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand told the press he is still awaiting a formal peace proposal from the Maoists in order to move ahead with peace talks. Chand said the GON would take a "positive stance" if the Maoists made an "authoritative and credible" offer of a peace proposal. Devi Prasad Ojha, Minister for Education and Sports, however, told the press that he expected the talks to be held by the second week of February, but refused to elaborate.

MAOISTS SET CONDITIONS FOR TALKS

10. The Maoists, in turn, have demanded that the government announce a formal peace offer before beginning dialogue. Maoist leader Prachanda issued a statement demanding that the GON comply with four conditions before dialogue can take place: that the terrorist designation by the government be lifted; that it stop killing innocent people; that it disclose the location of detainees; and that it provide a clear agenda of the issues that need to be discussed. According to Narayan Singh Pun, Minister for Physical Planning and Works, the GON is considering whether to lift the terrorist designation, but will not reach a decision until it has consulted with all major political parties. Party leaders quoted in the local press expressed skepticism regarding the Maoists' sincerity in pushing for talks.

MAOISTS TRY NEW STRATEGY IN GORKHA

11. In the historic western district of Gorkha, Maoists are trying to garner support from the villagers, according to local press reports. The Maoists reportedly have changed their tactics from using violence to handing out food and treats to the villagers. At the same time, however, the Maoists have warned that those who spy against them will be killed. Villagers, some willingly and some out of fear, provide food and shelter to the insurgents, making it more difficult for the security forces to take action against them.

AMID PEACE TALKS, MAOIST VIOLENCE CONTINUES

¶12. A bomb exploded in downtown Kathmandu on December 26, injuring seven people and damaging two buildings. On December 20, a group of Maoists brutally killed a schoolteacher in central Kavre district, dragging him from his bed, stabbing him with khukuris and iron rods, and pouring acid in his wounds. On December 21, Maoist rebels kidnapped a local development officer in the Ridibazar district. On December 22, Maoists also abducted 45 students from a secondary school in the Surkhet district. The students reportedly were released unharmed.

¶13. On December 23, a group of Maoists bombed the Mahuwari Police Post in Rupandehi district, completely destroying the post and all of the documents inside. Maoists shot and killed a National Intelligence Department (NID) inspector at his home in the Kathmandu Valley on December 24. Another officer was killed in Kapilvastu district on December 25 when Maoist rebels opened fire on him as he was conducting checks on a passenger bus. On that same day, another officer was killed in Tikapur, when he was called from his house by two Maoists, who then shot him. Two other policemen in the Syangja district were injured when a landmine was detonated by Maoists. On December 22, Maoist rebels set a Chief District Officer's house on fire after forcing the family members to vacate it. In another incident, a Royal Nepalese Army soldier was killed on December 22 in an ambush by Maoists in the eastern district of Panchthaar.

¶14. Maoists have ordered residents in the district of Surkhet to leave by early January, hinting at an attack on the district headquarters. Villagers have been asked to vacate their houses and shops.

PLEA TO MAOISTS TO STOP KILLING JOURNALISTS

¶15. Members of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) issued a plea to Maoists to stop killing members of the media after the kidnap and murder of a journalist who had been working for a pro-Maoist newspaper before surrendering to the security forces.

MAOISTS EXTORT MORE MONEY

¶16. Maoists have launched a massive "household tax" campaign, demanding money from households in the western and southern parts of northern Bhojpur district. The insurgents reportedly assess the tax on a sliding scale, according to the financial status of the families. Maoists have also intensified their collection of money from professionals in the Parbat and Ramechhap districts, demanding donations from teachers, government employees, and merchants.

¶17. Maoists have issued a 35-day ultimatum for all non-government organizations, including educational institutions, in the far-western district of Doti to register with them or face shutdowns. The Maoists have warned that those organizations who fail to register with the "people's government" will be forcibly closed.

MALINOWSKI